Red Chalk

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Red Chalk

by Entity_Sylvir

Summary

When Detective Hannibal Lecter is called to a journalist's brutal murder, he follows his leads into a dangerously seductive game with a suspect who's long realised that empathy can be a weapon, and so can sex. Caught in the weblines of an eerily-perceptive man who already knows far too much about his past, he finds the path before him turning very grey indeed.

Basic Instinct AU.

Notes

So, uh, here's the reason I've been utterly neglecting my other WIPs. Watched Basic Instinct two weeks ago and was whacked over the head with this idea, just got it out. The film (and Sharon Stone's character, who I fell in love with) is just a basis, so you won't need to be familiar with it to understand this. There are a few specific scene references for those who have seen it, though on the other side of things you won't be completely spoiled for the ending either.

This is from the first Basic Instinct film only, apparently Hugh Dancy was in the second but I haven't seen that one. It also kind of ended up being a role reversal AU from canon, which was interesting to explore.

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Chapter 1

Hannibal gets the call while he's washing the dishes from breakfast, Jack's gruff voice informing him briskly that there's a scene, there's a body, Alana's already there. His hands are dry before the call ends, and within five minutes he's changed and grabbing his badge on the way out the door. Weekend traffic holds him up enough that it's almost an hour before he's arriving to park his car by the police line and flashing his ID.

"Just upstairs, detective," the junior officer says as he waves Hannibal inside, jaw set in a greeting that can't quite be a smile given their circumstances. Hannibal gives a single nod and steps through the doorway. The stairs to the second floor lead on from the left.

The bedroom is already crowded with officers, various forensics people milling about bagging objects and snapping pictures. Jack stands against one wall, already in conversation with Hannibal's partner as the man himself walks up and greets them with, "Victim?"

Alana turns to look at him, before casting her eyes down onto the bed. The flame-red of the woman's hair mixes in a grotesque swirl of colour with the blood that cakes her face and torso. Ragged holes of torn flesh dot the right side of her face, neck, and shoulder where the murder weapon had stabbed through—either a right-handed killer or one that had been engaged in one of the more usual positions. The sheets that lie carelessly tossed aside, half hanging off the edge of the mattress, do nothing at all to conceal her nudity.

"Fredericka Lounds, age twenty-nine, reporter. Lives alone, found by her weekly cleaning service four hours ago who let themselves in with their own key every Saturday morning. Body is only a few hours cold, time of death estimated to have been between midnight to 2am last night."

Hannibal follows her gaze. "Murder weapon?"

"Screw-driver," Jack answers and hands over an evidence bag in which a long Phillips head protrudes from beneath its red plastic handle, skinny, sharp, and stained with flaking blood. "Found in the ensuite bathroom sink, blood dried on the head but the handle washed clean. Forensics will run it for prints, but it doesn't look hopeful."

"And the scarf?"

"The victim's, presumably. There are more in her wardrobe, all animal print. She has quite the collection."

Hannibal nods again, handing back the bag and stepping closer to the sturdy iron bedframe. The headboard is one of those sculptured pieces, dark metal rods weaving a twisting pattern between wide open gaps. It's one of the few modern designs that allows a pair of wrists to be easily bound, as the victim's still are to it by a leopard-print scarf. "Are we looking at rape?"

Alana shakes her head. "Autopsy will confirm, but while sexual penetration close to or at the time of death seems evident, there doesn't appear to be any bruising either vaginal or around

the body. Not even the wrists."

"Yep," cuts in one of the forensic guys, Brian something-or-other, a not entirely appropriate smirk on his face. "Just some good old-fashioned S and M." He raises an eyebrow, expression turning thoughtful as he adds, "Though I dare say murder's probably the worst kind of etiquette you could get."

Jack shushes him with a look. "She's clean, though," the chief continues a moment later. "No semen or other fluids."

"So he used a condom?"

"Or *she* used an aid." Alana reaches into her pocket and pulls out a notebook, where an address is scribbled in her own loose hand and labelled, *Wendy*. "Girlfriend. Same cleaners do her place too. If you're done here, we can get going."

She speaks with that curt, no-nonsense aura that Hannibal so admires about her, casting an inquiring look at Jack which is granted with a nod. They turn together on their heels to walk back out the bedroom door, and Hannibal can see her grimace as she shoots one last glance over at the unfortunate woman who lies splayed out across her bed as some sort of monstrous erotic sacrifice. He makes sure to school his face into something sufficiently similar.

* * *

Wendy answers the door of her slightly smaller city apartment with red-rimmed eyes and a tightly clenched jaw. "I already got the call," she says as she sits them down on the couch, perching on the very edge of her own seat like she's afraid it might collapse. "They told me I didn't need to say anything until someone else came around. I guess that's you guys?"

Alana hesitates a moment before replying, "Yes. We just have a few questions to ask you, if that's all right. Can you tell us when you last saw Fredericka?"

"I wasn't with her last night, if that's what you mean." Wendy takes a slow breath. "We had lunch together out, like we usually do, but she had another friend over for dinner."

Hannibal leans forward. "What kind of friend?"

"Well, actually Freddie's been—" she cuts off, and swallows hard. Her face seems to spasm, just briefly, before it school itself again. "Freddie *had* been working on a piece about him, they'd been spending a bit more time recently. You know, interviews and stuff."

Hannibal takes a moment, debating whether or not to tell her the truth, before simply continuing, "How long had they been friends, would you say?"

"Um, two years or so, maybe? Not as long as I've known Freddie."

"And did you know him as well?"

"Yeah," Wendy shrugs. "Knew him, sure, but we weren't really friends ourselves. I have his address if you want it?"

"Please," Alana says with a soft smile, taking out her notebook and pen and handing it over. "Oh, and, his name?"

Wendy returns the smile wanly. "Will," she replies, voice hoarse, and shifts in her tiny patch of seat. "Will Graham."

* * *

"Seems genuine enough," Alana comments as they get into the car once more. "Suspect or no?"

Hannibal turns the notebook over in his hand, one finger tracing idly over the slightly shaky letters. "Let's see what this Graham says about last night first."

In comparison, the second address leads to a shack by the beach on one of the those long, empty stretches between clumps of million-dollar mansions. It's only a single storey high, far from large but jutting upwards stockily to stand amid the salty sea winds. There's no answer at the door, and Hannibal rings the bell twice before Alana nudges him and points down the side towards a beach-chair set up on the sand.

The man reclined on it doesn't move as the two officers approach. He looks a good ten years younger than Hannibal, dark curly hair not messy but offhandedly tousled, dressed in a button shirt that lies open to expose his smooth chest. Short sleeves fall loosely around well-defined but not bulky biceps, and Hannibal involuntarily feels his gaze fall on where the man's black shorts ride up his left thigh as it's bent back against the arm of the chair.

He clears his throat before addressing, "Sir?"

A lazy roll of one eye, and the shrug of a shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir, are you Will Graham?"

The man shifts, finally, titling his head towards them. He could be called somewhat handsome, Hannibal supposes, but though his lightly stubbled features are far from dainty they do hold a certain tinge of prettiness. It's his gaze, however, that draws a second look, casual yet somehow piercingly calm. Hannibal swallows as he meets it. Judging by the flick of light blue eyes to his throat and the slight twist of a pink lip, it doesn't go unnoticed.

"Sure," Will drawls, a hint of the south in his voice. "This about Freddie?"

Hannibal casts a glance back over at Alana. "Did Wendy call you?"

"No." Will sits up and turns, swinging his legs around the side of the chair. He treats Alana to a single brief stare, flat and probing, before promptly forgetting her in favour of very deliberately looking Hannibal up and down. "What's your name?" he says after a beat, voice dropping just a little lower in pitch. Not quite husky enough to be suggestive, only barely toeing the side of unprofessional.

It takes a conscious effort for Hannibal not to shift under that intent. "I'm Detective Hannibal Lecter, and this is—"

"You're from Europe?"

"I—yes." Hannibal blinks, then presses on, "How did you know Miss Lounds—"

"Met her about two and a half years ago at a party," Will cuts in again, deliberately misinterpreting. "She was doing a piece on me, I suppose Wendy already told you?"

Hannibal takes a breath, then decides to go with the flow. "She mentioned it, but she didn't say what it was about."

"Do you know what Freddie did?"

"She was a reporter."

"Close." Will smiles, and it shows just a little too much teeth. "She was a crime journalist. Did Wendy tell you what I do?"

"No."

The smile widens. "I'm a crime writer." He leans back, and the edges of his shirt fall even further apart, revealing a single dark nipple. It only takes the briefest moment for Hannibal to catch his eyes wandering and bring them back to Will's face, yet it's enough for those lips to curl back into something a little more wicked. "She was doing a little interest piece, you know?" Will continues. "Mind against mind, fact against fiction, and all that."

"I see. And you met to discuss this last night?"

"That's right."

"What did you talk about, exactly?"

"We talked about killers. And what it's like to get into their heads."

There's a little silence, a stalemate. Will is still smiling sweetly, and Hannibal can't help the slight increase of his heart in his chest. Finally, it's Alana who steps up and forces Will's attention to her at last.

"Were you having an affair with Miss Lounds?" she asks crisply, voice laced with a tinge of ice.

Will looks over, regarding her plainly. "I suppose you could call it that," he says matter-of-factly, voice flat. "Fucked her girlfriend a few times too, before you ask, but she wasn't as good."

Hannibal blinks at that, and takes a bit to gather himself. "Did you have sex with Miss Lounds last night?"

Will turns back to him, smile slipping away, but expression utterly casual. "No."

"Did you meet her at her house?"

"Yes."

"What time did you leave?"

"About ten o'clock. After dinner."

"Were you sad to hear about her death?"

If Will is startled at all by the abrupt change in topic, he doesn't show it. "As much as I'd be if you died, or that pretty lady," he replies silkily, inclining his head over at Alana. "But I never really liked her."

"And yet, you were—"

"Fucking her? Yeah." He shrugs, smirk beginning to creep onto his face again. "Haven't you ever fucked a girl you didn't like, Hannibal?" he says, letting the foreign name linger on his tongue. "*Or a guy*?"

There's another silence, then, longer. Heavier. Settling between them until Alana clears her throat sharply.

"Well then, Mr. Graham," she presses, stepping forward to physically push Hannibal to the side. "Would you mind if we asked you a few more questions about Miss Lounds?"

Will breaks eye contact with Hannibal, only to turn away and lie down once more against the back of the chair. "Yeah," he replies, "I would. Am I a suspect?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to arrest me?"

Hannibal feels Alana glance inquiringly at him, though his own eyes don't leave the other man. He has two moles on the left side of his neck, only small, but quite dark. Hannibal is the one who answers. "No."

"Well then." Will swings his legs around again, letting his eyelids fall shut and stretching out in the same, sprawling position they'd found him in. "Guess I'll see you guys again when you do."

* * *

"So, going to tell me what the hell that was?"

Alana's voice is clipped, directed away as she keeps her gaze trained out the window. Hannibal, meanwhile, keeps his own on the road, and only grips down a little tighter at the steering wheel.

"He's guilty, you must agree?"

She lets out a cough of laughter. "Yeah sure, whatever. Now have you ever fucked a guy, *Hannibal*?

Hannibal breathes in once, deeply, and exhales between his teeth. "He's an interesting man."

"Well if by interesting you mean completely kicked in the head. And guilty," Alana adds, almost as an afterthought

They reach an intersection, and the light changes yellow to red just as Hannibal approaches the line. He leans on the brake, and sets his jaw. "Then we'll prove it."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alana beats him to the station the next morning, and catches him at the door with a stout paperback in her hand. "Hey," she says in lieu of a good morning, "we've got him."

The cover is lurid red, abstractly shaped. The thick black words read, *Boater's Girl, by William Howle*. Alana hands it to him and Hannibal turns it over to the back, on which is a stamp-sized picture of Will. He looks a few years younger, looking straight into the camera, unsmiling but with an unmistakable quirk to his mouth.

"Came out eighteen months ago," Alana continues. "Page one hundred seventy-five, main character gets murdered by her mechanic boyfriend. Guess what, he ties her to the bed with her scarf and stabs her with a screwdriver during sex."

Hannibal flips to the page in question, and skims down the paragraphs. The writing is less lurid than he'd expected, but certainly no classic either. Still, there's a distinct directness in the style, a casual and hard reality.

"Do we bring him in?"

"Well it's hardly evidence," Alana says with a low sigh. "It's a published novel, anyone could have read it. And of course, first thing he's going to say is that he'd be an idiot to kill someone in the same way as it was described in his own book."

"A double bluff against a double bluff," Hannibal muses, then, "I want to talk to him about this."

"Course you do."

She gets a sharp look at that, but only gives a dismissive wave of her hand. "We can call him for questioning, at least. Might unnerve him a bit. You have the keys?"

Hannibal frowns, cocking his head. "I'm capable of bringing him in by myself, Alana," he says, and refrains from expressing his doubts that the man they'd met yesterday would find any police attempt unnerving. He then scowls a little at his partner's slight amused look, turning to the door and taking two steps before he realises he's still holding the book. He spins quickly to pass it back into Alana's waiting hand, adding offhandedly, "Have you read it?"

She gives a one-armed shrug. "No, but I skimmed it a little this morning."

"What do you think of it?"

"Not bad, actually. Goes a bit too much for shock value, though, very vivid."

"Indeed," Hannibal says as he makes to leave again. "Well researched."

* * *

Will answers at the bell this time, leaning against the doorframe in a light blue robe that ends well above his knees. "You're back earlier than I'd thought you'd be." He smiles at Hannibal and juts out a hip in a way that hitches the hem even higher. "Well, come in."

He turns around and leads back into the house, forcing Hannibal to follow to keep him in sightline. "Actually, Mister Graham, I'm here to bring you in."

"Really?" Will shoots a look over his shoulder, just barely catching Hannibal as he hastily darts his eyes upwards from the man's bare legs. "You guys work fast."

"Just for some questioning. You have the right to an attorney."

Will snorts, gesturing a wide hand. "Does it look like I can afford one of those things?" He continues walking, hands falling to the tie of his robe, and Hannibal continues to match his steps until he pauses and looks back again with a raised eyebrow. "Are you going to let me change into something more appropriate? Or are you going to insist on watching to make sure I don't flee out the window?"

Hannibal makes a small sound in the back of his throat and stops abruptly, turning away as Will disappears into the next room with a tut and a grin. There's several moments of soft, indeterminable sounds, then his voice calls out again.

"Could I ask you to pass me my tie? I think I left in the foyer."

Hannibal looks over to see a simple but elegant blue chequered tie on the stand by the door. "The blue one, Mister Graham?"

"Yes, that's it."

He reaches out to pick it up, running his fingers over the decent but not top quality silk and turning to walk over. "H—" he begins, only to have the word die in his throat as he rounds the next doorway

Will is entirely naked, robe lying discarded on the couch of what presumably is the living room. He's not particularly muscled but his form is lean, from his toned legs to his flat stomach. He's also lightly tanned all over without a hint of a line, which draws a flash of images of the man spread out nude on his own stretch of beach.

"Thank you."

Hannibal abruptly snaps his head around away when Will steps up to pluck the tie from his motionless hand. His face is utterly composed, but his eyes blaze.

"And, *Hannibal*," he goes on, "you can call me Will."

Hannibal licks his lips to wet them, then has to do it again. "I will wait for you in the car," he says, gaze firmly fixed off out the window, and turns on his heel fast enough that he can hear the squeak of rubber against the floorboards.

* * *

Will emerges several minutes later in a crisp black shirt and white dress pants, tie looped in a neat windsor. He stays surprisingly quiet though the car ride, though Hannibal can feel the weight of that searching gaze the whole way. And he lets himself be led to the interrogation room without hesitation.

"Can I have some water?" he says finally as he sits himself opposite Hannibal at the small table, upper body seeming to blend in amongst the dark-panelled walls.

"I don't know if—" Hannibal begins, but is cut off as Will turns his head to look right into the one way mirror that hides the observation room.

"Please?"

There's a click of a door somewhere outside, and footsteps. Moments later their own door opens and one of the other officers enters with a plastic cup of water.

"Thank you," Will says graciously, flashing a smile. The officer makes a vague attempt to return it before hurrying out again.

"So," Hannibal begins as Will puts the cup to his lips, taking the tiniest of sips and teasing the rim between his teeth. "You are an author, of crime fiction."

"Yes."

"Can you tell us about your latest book?"

"The one I'm working on now?"

Hannibal pulls out the copy of *Boater's Girl* from the tote space beneath the table, and lays it on the desktop. "No, the last one you published."

Will drinks again, taking his time pressing the thin white plastic against his lips before lowering it to his knee, raised where legs are crossed. "Well you've got it right there. What do you need me to tell you about it?"

Hannibal sits up a little straighter in his chair. "The female character in the book is killed with a screwdriver."

"I know. I wrote it.'

"This occurs during sexual intercourse, while she is tied to her bed by her scarf."

"Yes." Will begins to tap his fingers against the flat of the table, drumming in a light, regular rhythm. "I've always found scarves such interesting things, haven't you? Here we are a society which has feared and wielded the noose, and yet we willingly tighten these things around our own necks."

"Hmm." Hannibal's eyes fall from Will's face to the steady movement of his left hand, then across to the still almost full cup held in his right, top edge warped just the slightest with the hinting marks of teeth. "Are you aware that this is the exact manner in which Miss Fredericka Lounds was murdered?"

"I am now." Will frowns, and leans forward. "You don't think I did it because it's written in my book, do you? I'd be a pretty careless killer to announce myself like that."

"Yes, you would." Hannibal inclines his head. "And yet, that exact obviousness rules your book not an announcement after all, and hence you would in fact be a very careful killer indeed."

The other man chuckles, tossing his head so his curls bounce a little around his face. "Bluffs and triple bluffs, *Hannibal*?" He leans on the last word. "But if I needed to get myself ...off," he says, slowly, weightily, "why would I go to all this trouble with a book, when I could simply shoot her in the head on some day when I'm not supposed to be around and hide the body so I'd never even be suspected in the first place, hmm?"

Slowly, the detective reaches out to slide the book off the table, and back into the tote underneath. "Indeed," he replies softly. "Why would you do that?"

Will raises the cup to his lips for the third time, though Hannibal has doubts by now that any of the water is actually being drunk. He waits for him to finish before asking again, "Moving forward, can you tell us a bit more about yourself and Miss Lounds?"

Will shrugs. "I met her a bit over two years ago, through a mutual acquaintance. Some editor guy, can’t remember his name anymore. We got talking, she asked me if we wanted to talk some more, I didn't say no."

"When did she get the idea to write an article about you?"

"About a year ago, it's been in the works on and off for a while. That's when we first started spending any real time together, before it was mainly emails and the odd other mutual acquaintance."

"Yet you say you did not like her."

"She was a publicity-hungry, rumour-mongering, poor excuse for a reporter."

Hannibal pauses at the bluntness, and presses his palms face down on the table in front of him. "Still," he says after a interval, "you continued to associate with her."

Will exhales, lips pursing to a pucker at the end of the breath. "Freddie Lounds may have a slimy example of a human being, but she still *was* a human being. Our race holds many slices of personalities, not all of them are nice, not all of them even that interesting, but that's how we are. She wasn't quite different, but at least she was getting close to it." His eyes, which had drifted to wander along the walls, now turn back to Hannibal. "I like different."

"I see." There's a bigger pause this time, the two regarding each other, and Hannibal doesn't move a muscle besides his mouth as he asks again, "And when did your sexual relationship commence?"

"It was hardly a relationship," Will replies with a raised eyebrow and a quirk of his shoulder. "She wanted to fuck me. I let her. Didn't happen that often, first time maybe eight months ago."

Hannibal takes the mental note, then clears his throat. "For the records, Mister Graham, I have to ask you to please keep your language professional."

Will snorts. "What are you going to do, make me stop talking?"

Hannibal thinks, and admits there is a point there. He sighs just a little, then continues. "Did you enjoy your relations with her?"

"Sure, she fucked pretty well."

"Was she the only person you had relations with in this time?"

A dark chuckle, bordering on dirty. "Are you serious?"

"Did you ever experiment with her, with practices out of the ordinary?"

"Be a bit more specific?"

"Did you tie her up?"

Will stills his fingers. "No."

"Never?"

"*No*." His countenance smooths out into black playfulness, smile serene. "I don't do that with women."

Hannibal finds himself resisting the urge to turn to the mirror. It's a rookie mistake, the biggest break of the illusion of the privacy, and most blatant tell of an interrogator's disquiet. The impulse is always there, unavoidable, though it's been a long time since it was anything more than itch.

"You have already stated," he says, slowly, finally, "that you did not have intercourse with Miss Lounds on the night of her death. Can you confirm this once again?"

"Yes, I can. I didn't."

"Did either of you drink any alcohol while together?"

"She had a glass of wine over dinner. That's all."

"Did you partake in any narcotics or other possibly mind-altering substances?

"No." Will sniffs, looking almost offended. "Never. I like my mind the way it is, thank you very much."

That takes Hannibal somewhat by surprise. Not entirely the hedonist then, or perhaps just indulgent in a different way. "Where did you go after you left her house?"

"I went home, alone, and went to sleep."

"Is there anybody who can verify this?"

"No, there isn't."

Hannibal curls up his hands, and crosses his fingers. "You realise that circumstantial evidence is very strong against you?" He waits, and watches as Will takes yet another slow, minuscule, drink.

"Yes."

"And yet you don't seem to be taking this investigation very seriously."

The laugh he gets in response is smoky. "Oh," Will breathes, leaning in, the hand still holding his cup dropping to his lap and the other leaning forearm-down against the tabletop. "Don't be like that, Hannibal. I thought we were building rapport." His grin when his lips peel back isn't entirely charming. "I suppose if you don't like it, you could always send your partner in. I'll get over it eventually, she really is a pretty one after all. You fucked her?"

It's an open challenge. Hannibal tries very hard not to imagine what Jack, Alana, and whatever host of others are thinking behind their silvered glass. He lets his accent curl the word on his reply.

"No."

"But you've thought about it, then?"

"No."

Will's eyelids drop to half-mast, and his voice to a whisper. "Liar."

Hannibal pushes abruptly from the table to a protesting squeal of wood against the floor. "I do believe we done here, Mister Graham."

Will starts at the movement, composure faltering just barely for the first time. Hannibal would allow himself that triumph, if it weren't for the fact that jerk of Will's arm causes his water to slash out over the front of his pants. And it only takes a moment for the

collectedness to return as the man stands quickly, a small flash of pink tongue darting out to wet his lips as he runs a hand down himself. "I already said," he breathes, "Call me Will."

The soaked white fabric is almost entirely transparent, clinging to every line of Will's crotch as he thumbs slowly over the soft swell. It's exceedingly obvious that he isn't wearing any underwear, that there's nothing between the thin cloth and his bare skin. His gaze stays trained on Hannibal even while the other man's slips inevitably down from his face, watching as the detective feels his pulse hitch with something that isn't quite familiar. A pull, yes, but also an alert. A warning dipped in honey.

It takes Jack to break the tension, flinging the door open none too gently with his face set. "We appreciate your co-operation, Mister Graham. You're free to go."

Will turns and smiles at the police chief, small and polite. "Thank you," he replies, half-way between sincere and patronising, then casts another glance down at Hannibal from the corners of his eyes. "But, I was driven here?"

Jack looks over also, but Hannibal ignores his superior’s scrutiny. The front two legs of his chair lift up off the ground as he stands fast enough to almost knock his seat over, and they land again with a dull thunk. "I'll wait for you in the car. Again," he says, and promptly strides off out the door.

He runs almost straight into Alana on his way out, who to her credit only flashes him a tight smile as he passes. "You know," is all she says, "you were right. He is an interesting man."

* * *

Hannibal doesn't let their next car ride stay quite, though he does keep the radio shut off and the windows fully wound up. He trips all the locks as soon as Will pulls closed his door.

"You raised a good point," he drops casually as he pulls out from the parking lot and flips on the right indicator, too casually. "If you needed an alibi, you could have found a better one. But if you didn't, then why did you write the book?

Will chuckles in a huffy breath. "Because," he says quietly, "it's fiction. I can do whatever I like, with fiction. I control a whole world, and everyone in it. I can make anything happen whenever I want it to." He turns in his seat so that he's facing across the car. "Do you ever think about that, about how much power a writer has?"

Hannibal doesn’t answer straight away, but lets Will's words twist through the air between them, softly hypnotic. Ahead of them, another car cuts across the land and he grimaces, jabbing the brake and sending them jolting forwards in their seats. "I think," he replies finally, "that you like playing games, Will Graham. And that you can be awfully good at them." The slightest smile blooms across his face, and something unfurls in his chest that burns a little too closely to anticipation. "As it happens, so can I."

Chapter End Notes

So there goes my best interpretation of *that* scene. Couldn't quite get Will in a skirt, sorry XD.

Chapter 3

Doctor Du Maurier's office is all contrast, pristine white carpet against the dark mahogany desk and blood-red couches against strategically-placed perfect green ferns. Hannibal takes his seat on one such couch and crosses his legs, then uncrosses them again when he realises whose pose he'd unconsciously mimicked. Bedelia greets him with warmth, but not friendliness, and crosses her own legs under her beige skirt.

"This is only a wrap-up," she begins, tone as level as it always is, "so I don't have very many questions. How have you been sleeping lately?"

"Fine," Hannibal replies, truthfully.

"Any dreams?"

"Not bad ones."

"Any anxiety?"

"Not more than the usual from the job."

"If you were to describe your current mental state in your own words, what would they be?"

Hannibal takes a few seconds, flicking his eyes over to framed picture on the wall of a generic black-and-white cityscape. "I would say, I am dealing. And moving on."

"Yes you are." Bedelia's face is as blankly professional as ever, though she cocks her head to one side. "You're doing very well, in fact, better than most officers after their first accidental shooting."

"Well, that is good?"

"I suppose." She parts her lips a little. "I must admit, I'm not entirely sure I've gotten though to you. You're a good officer, Detective Lecter, though even in all our sessions I never really felt I came to knowing you as a person."

"But that is who I am," Hannibal replies, words as flat as his interlocutor's. "I am a good officer. It's what I hope to be."

"Hmm." Bedelia stands, and walks back over to her desk. "At any rate, as long as you are effective in your work and not a danger to your colleagues, I will recommend that you be fully cleared. This shall be our last session." She opens the file already laid out on her desk, and begins to write.

"Thank you, Doctor," Hannibal says, and receives no answer. He raises himself on his own, smoothing down his simple suit and leaving Bedelia's office quietly. The door shuts with a knock of wood and a dull metal snick. He notices idly that the name plaque has a slight

smudge of something light but congealing on it, perhaps sauce from a careless person's finger.

He's barely turned away when he hears his name called, and sees the department's other psychologist loping up towards him. He schools his features into a polite smile.

"Detective Lecter."

"Doctor Chilton."

Chilton stops before him, skidding a little in his too-shiny shoes. "Hello, uh, not to hold you up," he blusters, "but I heard you were looking at Will Graham on the Lounds case."

"Yes," Hannibal replies, then, "why?"

"Oh," Chilton peeps, almost as if surprised to be asked. "Nothing, really, just good on you for nailing the bastard."

Hannibal frowns, taking a small step backwards. "You are familiar with Will Graham?"

"Oh yes." Chilton clears his throat. "Well his books, of course, but also I worked down in Louisiana for a bit once, before I was here," he says, and Hannibal resits the urge to add, 'obviously'. "Well, this Graham tried to apply for the force when I there, but I dis-recommended it and he didn't pass. Just as well, the guy's a psycho."

"Really." Hannibal angles himself to properly face Chilton front-on, finally turning his whole ear to listen. "What makes you say that?"

"Well for a start, he's got some kind of disorder, I might even say clinical. It's not autism, though it said on his file that it was suspected when he was young. No, I think it's something on the other end." Chilton, in his earnestness, makes an odd kind of face. "He *sees* people, you know? He has this way of getting in your head, and—and messing around with you. It's actually sort of interesting what he does, maybe even fascinating, but he gave me the creeps every time he looked at me." Chilton shifts from one foot to the other then leans in as if sharing something conspiratorial. "I think he's your man."

Hannibal thinks of Will's comment the previous day about his mind, and notes the new information with concentrated interest. However, it having come from Frederick Chilton, his only reaction is to step back again and look over at the so-called doctor down his nose. "Well," he says, "thank you for the background." He takes two steps around the psychologist and continues on towards his desk. "But I didn't need you to tell me that."

The station isn't quite bustling, but it's full enough. He takes his desk in peace and spends a little while filling out paperwork from yesterday's questioning, stopping once to buy a cup of surprisingly decent coffee from the machine by the centre. He goes over the transcript twice afterwards, once to write up a summary and another just to read, not that he needs it with every word still ringing bright between his ears.

Lunch is a sandwich brought from home in a bulk-bought brown paper bag—salami, lettuce, and homemade red pepper salsa on baguette. A couple of the other officers around him call his food choices pretentious, but he enjoys enough both the preparation and the convenient piquant meal to pass the comments over. He's crumpling the bag and dropping it into the bin beneath his desk when Alana makes her way over with a cream-coloured file.

"How did your session go this morning?" she asks, and he smiles back.

"Well, thank you. I'm being recommended for full clearance."

"That's good." She hesitates, and purses her lips. "I've seen others after shootings it's—I know it's tough."

Hannibal nods, gaze drifting away, and counts a beat before asking, "Have you done the background check?"

She nods, and hands him the folder which flips open to a inflated driver license picture. "No priors," she recites, "but a few mentions. Born in New Orleans, currently thirty-one years old. His father died of a heart attack when he was seventeen, his mother abandoned them less than a year after he was born. He tracked her down again when he was nineteen, only for her to overdose on a bottle of pills three months later. He was questioned, but the death was ruled as suicide. Then he enrolled in college and got half-way through a degree in criminal psychology before he dropped out, and tried to join the police but was disallowed for some reason."

Hannibal shuffles through the files and hums before looking back up. "Mental instability," he fills in, "Doctor Chilton just informed me. He himself was working in Louisiana at the time."

"Hm. Small world." Alana brushes a lock of hair from her face and Hannibal finds his eyes tracing the pale arch of her throat, then catches himself and turns his focus back to the papers. "Anyway," she goes on, "he published his first book a year later, to moderate success. He's gotten five others out since, nothing to make him rich but enough to get him by pretty well. His work apparently isn't mainstream enough to get really popular but critics have praised him for his style and 'commitment', whatever that means."

Hannibal snaps the file shut again with a clap of cardboard. "I think we can prove exactly what that means."

Alana sighs in response, and chews on her bottom lip. "Hannibal, what you said to him was right, there's a lot of circumstantial evidence but that's all. We've got no motive, nothing to actually tie him to the crime, and sure he's been playing tricky but he hasn't said anything close to incriminating yet." Frustration creases her forehead, but it's coupled with the determined set of her jaw.

"Then let me talk to him again."

"Again, already? On what grounds?"

Hannibal casts his eyes away. "Not bring him in, I'll go over. By myself."

Alana raises one brow, slowly. She opens her mouth a few moments before the words come out. "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

Hannibal presses his lips together into a grim line. He holds the file back out to Alana and takes a breath in through his nose of her floral perfume as she reaches to take it hesitantly. "I think our Will likes to dance," he says, already turning away, "so let us show him how bright the spotlights really are."

* * *

There's both no answer at the door and an empty beach chair that day. The side gardens are well-groomed from what Hannibal can see as he makes his way around the side of the house, carefully avoiding two beds of flowers and another of herbs until he spots a shed further behind. It's only just moving out of noon and the sun is stronge, but the sea spray provides a comforting coolness in the air.

Will doesn't look up when the door is opened. He's bent over a work table, dressed in a grease-stained shirt and baggy jeans which Hannibal has to look over twice. The shed itself, meanwhile, is littered with mechanical odds and ends, various tools hanging on the walls and natural light streaming through from two opposing cut-out windows. Hannibal makes it three steps in before he feels something crunch and lifts his shoe to see he'd trodden on a small metal clip.

"Be a darling," is all Will greets, still unmoving from his hunched form, "and pass me the screw-driver on the far left, will you?"

It takes Hannibal a bit to respond, caught a little off his guard by the change from the previous atmosphere. A quick glance reveals the screw-drivers on a rack on the right wall, and he reaches out to pluck off the left-most. It's a skinny long Phillips head, and he only hesitates a fraction longer when he takes in the red plastic handle. Identical to the murder weapon.

"Thank you," Will says as the tool is handed over, taking it nimbly in his fingers and angling it to tweak a few things in the mass of machinery before him that are utterly lost to Hannibal. He puts it down several twists later and sighs in satisfaction, finally looking up. "Are we going for a ride again?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "No, I just thought I'd drop by."

A teasing smile tugs at Will's lips. "Oh? Did you happen to be in the area?"

"Maybe," Hannibal replies. "What else is in the area?"

Will laughs, tossing back his head. "Careful, I'm really starting to like you." Then he gestures down at the table. "It's almost done. I was going to go back in about now anyway. Would you

like a drink?"

Hannibal ignores the question and asks instead, "Is this a hobby of yours?"

"Just a little. Bit of an amateur mechanic on the side, fix a few things up for people around. This one's a boat motor," he says, and smiles that toothy smile of his again.

"A boat," Hannibal repeats, and doesn't move.

Will pushes back his stool and stands, not turning to the door but stepping forward. He slips only a fraction into the other man's personal space as he asks with a fabricated lightness, "Last session go well?"

Hannibal refuses to let himself stiffen. "Fine," he pushes out, and manages to keep his voice flat.

"Well that's good." Will wipes his greasy hands sloppily on his shirt without looking down. "It's got to be hard, killing that guy. You miss him?"

"Not personally, I didn't know Inspector Budge particularly well. He was just another colleague."

"A colleague with whom you had repeated hostile altercations with before his death, that frequently bordered on violence?"

Hannibal swallows, and brings his teeth together inside his mouth with a dull click. "It was an accident," he says slowly, and tightly. "He was in the line of fire. These things happen in the field."

"So I've heard." Will moves close still, feet making no sound on the rough concrete floor. "Just like they happened with James Gray In Essex before your last transfer, and Donald Sutcliffe and Marissa Schurr in Minneapolis." Hannibal inhales sharply, and a moment later feels the warm puff of Will's breath now close enough to reach his face. "Oh. Doesn't Crawford know about the others?"

Silence. The tension is electric, bouncing in the small space between scraps of rust-bitten metal and sharply-gleaming tools, jumping up over both men's skins. Slowly, Will lifts a hand, moving as if to cup Hannibal's cheek but then missing to gently stroke behind his ear and down his neck. And Hannibal lets it happen.

At his vantage point, he can see a small dark smudge above Will's eyebrow, and imagines the man reaching up to brush away an idle curl with the same hand that's now come to a rest on his own collarbone. There's most definitely a glint in Will's eyes, but it isn't the same kind of crazy that Hannibal is used to seeing. He knows, though, that it makes Will that much more dangerous. He's a little puzzle, an unmarked box that just so compels to be opened. Of all the perfectly carved panes that Hannibal has crafted in his mind over his years among others, one thing he never quite managed to let go of was that childish urge of curiosity to poke and see what happens.

"Tell me about your mother."

If he'd been expecting Will to be caught off guard, he'd have completely missed the mark. Will simply regards him for a moment, then a moment too long, before saying in lieu of replying, "Why don't you tell me about your sister?"

That one, unbidden, makes Hannibal freeze.

"Just rotten luck, isn't it?" Will continues in that breathy lilt of his. "Parents killed in a hit-and-run, little daughter holds on for long enough to flatline over a life-support malfunction. You know, Hannibal, if I were you, I wouldn't just take that. I'd be angry. Angry at the world for stealing them, angry at everyone who lived while they didn't."

His voice rises, finally, on the last words, and something cracks a little in Hannibal's mind. Something cold, consuming, emotions he'd long pushed down and impulses he'd kept so carefully reigned. In a flash he catches Will's wrist in a death-grip, forcing his arm behind his back and pulling their chests flush together, almost nose to nose. He's breathing heavily, himself, but Will is positively panting.

Even in their short acquaintance, stalemate has already become a familiar stance. And yet that old flavour isn't quite what's in the air when Hannibal finally lets go with a jerk and a step back. Instead, there's a distinct bite of success that can't entirely be ignored.

"Always a pleasure!" Will calls as Hannibal walks out and away, two steps faster than normal, to no reply.

* * *

The drive over to Alana's is spent ruminating, and breathing. It's been some time since Hannibal's painstakingly erected exterior has broken like that, since he's had to bring himself under control in such a way. His partner finishes early on Mondays, he knows, she'd be home by now. He finds the way from Will's place with single-minded focus.

She answers the door with a greeting that dies when she sees the way he stands. He speaks before she has a chance to.

"He knows about me."

She steps aside to let him in, an invitation which he takes without pause.

"He knew I was seeing Doctor Du Maurier," he continues, walking in without removing his shoes, and not sitting. "He knew about Budge, and about—" he catches his tongue before he says more, then changes, "and about my family."

"Hannibal." She says his name, just that, once. Firmly. And he turns. "Hannibal, you're letting him get to you."

"He already got to me." He doesn't raise his voice now, but his accent sits a little heavier than usual. "How did he know, Alana?"

"I don't know," she replies lightly, finally bringing his gaze to meet hers properly instead of darting about her homely apartment. "But," she continues slowly, "none of that is technically private. It's all findable, even if not easily." She shuts the door and walks closer to him, cautiously, as if approaching an animal who might pounce. "Graham's good," she says, and it's that soft earnestness that Hannibal has come for. "But getting into you, he's showing more of himself. And we'll find him there."

She smiles a little, encouragingly, and after a moment Hannibal returns it. But with something less sanguine, and more resolved. "Yes," he replies. "I'll find him."

* * *

He isn't entirely sure what he's doing when he returns to Will's house that afternoon, what he expects to see. But his very skin seem to itch, urging him to act, and so he goes.

He'd stayed at a Alana's for just under an hour, accepting her offer of a drink and taking a cool bottle of good beer. She'd tried to make some small talk but it hadn't taken, and in the end she simply opened her laptop to get on with her own things while leaving him on her couch to contemplate. He hadn't even done that much thinking, his mind strangely jumpy, moving from his attempted examination of the facts to the way Will walked with that pointed swing of his hips, to the fire in his gaze in that yellow-lit shed. It wasn't until he was leaving that Alana pointed to his neck and frowned as she said idly, "I think you've got something there." It was grease. He accepted a tissue wordlessly.

He'd made a stop back at the station on the way and selected another one of the unmarked vehicles, with dark tinted windows and which Will wouldn't recognise. The empty stretch of beach that constitutes the man's neighbourhood doesn't provide much cover, but thankfully there is a council car park not too far down the road. Hannibal brings the car to a perfect stop between two parallel lines and sits in for a wait. Will's car is parked in his driveway, same as it was earlier that day and the days before it, a moderately-priced but older brand. Hannibal imagines the motor must be self-kept.

The day dims slowly into evening, an occasional car whizzing past. But it seems that Hannibal is getting lucky that night, when Will's front door open barely an hour later to reveal the man dressed in what appears from the distance to be a thin dark coat. Hannibal does up his seatbelt as a faint chirp sounds of the remote unlock, and turns the key as Will pulls out and turns left down the road. He waits thirty seconds before following.

They drive for about twenty minutes through light traffic, Hannibal switching lanes and changing speed several times to hide his tailing. The journey ends at a street lined with inexpensive and student-popular apartments, with Will parking out front and heading to ring

one buzzer. Hannibal rolls to a stop slowly himself and watches the building carefully. Several second later, a foyer light turns on in the left-hand window of the third storey.

He stops five buildings down once Will disappears inside, and makes his way up the street and across the lawn. The numbers of the buzzers indicate two apartments on each storey, and a peak through the window by the door shows 101 on the left and 102 on the right. The name plaque beside 301 reads, *Abigail Hobbs*. Satisfied, Hannibal allows himself a quirk of his lips, and turns away.

He doesn't have very high hopes that Will will be leaving that apartment that night, and he ignores the slight stirring in his stomach which that thought brings. Instead, he returns to the car, starts it, and sets off away. The two words of tomorrow's work roll over in his mind.

The name sounds vaguely familiar.

Chapter 4

A quick google search over machine coffee the next morning refreshes his memory. He can still recall the Minnesota Shrike case from a few years previous, the serial killer who'd terrified families and college girls across the country to end in a bloodbath in his own home. A later article he brings up reveals the fate of said bloodbath's only survivor, reporting that the Shrike's seventeen-year-old daughter was found not guilty and has now relocated, hoping to move on from the horror. Her date of birth puts her current age as twenty, which makes Hannibal stare a little at his computer screen. There admittedly isn't much he'd put past Will Graham at this point, but he'd like to hope that having an affair with a traumatised adolescent would be one of them.

Alana catches him at lunchtime in the process of confirming that Abigail Hobbs is currently a university student, English major. She listens to his recount of the previous evening's discovery with slightly parted lips and a growing frown.

"That tail wasn't authorised," she says carefully afterwards, choosing her words slowly.

Hannibal acknowledges it with a half-nod. "I suppose I've always been more forgiving of the unorthodox than you, Alana."

"Yes well the law isn't, Hannibal. That evidence isn't admissible." Her voice hardens a little, there.

"It's not evidence, just another piece of Will's Graham's puzzle. Once we have him won't we need to bring it up."

Alana exhales, and gives a shake of her head. "Are you planning to do it again?"

"Possibly."

"He could call stalking on you."

"But he won't, even if he does realise it. He enjoys playing too much to bring in officials on a little thing like that."

"*He* enjoys playing?" She drops her volume with a tell-tale flick of her eyes to the sides. "Hannibal," she says quietly, "I know he unsettled you, but I think you might be getting just a little too invested here."

Hannibal regards her for several moments, flatly, in her put-together hair and perfectly ironed skirt. Then he turns back towards his computer and replies half to himself, "He doesn't unsettle me."

* * *

The rest of the day is largely unproductive. The autopsy reports come in, revealing nothing more than what was already evident. No further evidence was found at the scene, no fingerprints, no DNA, not a single trace of the flighty killer. Routine investigations by other officers reveal that the scarf did indeed belong to the deceased, appearing in several photographs. Questioning also officially clears Wendy the girlfriend, who is remembered by many to have been in a city club that night until late, over an hour's drive from the crime scene. There's not much more to be said about Will, which means that Hannibal finds his focus wandering as he writes up what's needed on rote. He knocks off early.

He's not even entirely surprised when he pulls into his street to see a familiar car parked on the curb in front of his house, graciously not taking up his driveway. Will is sitting on his doorstep, arms crossed over his bent knees and a small black bag on the paving beside him. He smiles in greeting as Hannibal steps out and tries not to slam the door.

"How did you find out where I live?" The, *and everything else,* goes unsaid.

Will stands and takes a few steps forwards. "Just a little thing of mine," he replies easily, smile undeterred. "Got this trick, I'm good at thinking like other people. I might not be rich, I might not always be able to give people what they want, but I can find out how to." His gaze drops from Hannibal's eyes to his lips. "Nothing personal, just research. It's the hallmark of any good writer."

Hannibal stops once they're close enough to touch, though not quite as close as last time. "You're researching me as a writer?"

"Mm, yes, didn't I mention? I'm using you in my next book."

"Really." He starts walking again, and pulls out his keys. "What's it about?"

"A detective," Will answers, following as Hannibal turns the lock and pulls on the handle of the screen door. "Who gets stuck on the wrong suspect."

"And how does it end?"

"He drives himself crazy."

"How interesting." Hannibal eases open the wooden door and wipes his leather shoes twice back and forth on the doormat, twisting his head to look over his shoulder. "Would you like to come in? Maybe we can have that drink."

"Thought you'd never ask."

Will makes his way curiously to the living room once he enters, picking up his bag on the way. He settles down in a couch and continues to let his eyes wander as Hannibal pours a glass of good red wine from his cabinet, tracing over every detail in the immaculately decorated room. He wrinkles his nose when a second glass is set in front of the bottle.

"Got anything stronger?" he asks when he speaks again, running one hand slowly over the pristine white leather armrest. "Not really a big grape man myself."

Hannibal acquiesces smoothly, sliding the wine back into place and reaching further in for a stout decanter of scotch. He fills the wineglass with it, though, just to see the raised eyebrow that garners him when he hands Will a generous three fingers.

"Thank you."

"Cheers."

They drink slowly, both of them, though while Hannibal take his time to savour he suspects that Will does it merely to rub the rim a little longer against his full bottom lip. He speaks again after, lightly.

"Here, I came to give you a little something."

Hannibal sits himself on the couch opposite as Will reaches into his bag and pulls out a book that bears an abstract cover much like *Boater's Girl*'s, although in blue. The bold title reads, *Sweet Seventeen*.

"Another one of yours?"

Will nods. "Got it out a little over two years ago."

"What's this one about, then?"

"A girl who kills her mother, after watching her kill her father." He strokes a hand over the cover, slowly, almost lovingly. "You're not the only person I've based a character on, you know, this one's Abigail's story."

He meets Hannibal's gaze frankly, and Hannibal swallows hard. He considers denial for a moment, pretending ignorance, before replying simply, "But Abigail Hobbs killed her father, after watching him kill her mother, not the other way around."

Will smiles a little, not a grin or a smirk like Hannibal's seen before, but small. And more genuine. "Well, it's not a history book. She only gave me the final push, really, I'd been sitting on the draft for a while before I met her." And it's then that the turn of his lips turns deeper, sharper. "This was actually the first one I ever wrote. I get inspiration from more than one place, after all."

Hannibal doesn't reply to that, just takes a sip of his wine and lets the dry bitterness flood his tongue. He notes dimly somewhere in the back of his mind that he is gripping the glass very firmly. He swallows again, audibly at least to his own ears, before saying, "And how does this one end?"

The answer comes quickly, and easily. "She gets over it, and lives happily ever after."

Hannibal's eyebrow twitches. He isn't entirely sure what his reaction to that is. So he asks again, simply, casually, "She's your friend, then?"

"I'd say so." Will gets an amused kind of look in his eye, like he knows exactly what Hannibal is trying not to imply. Then it fades again as he leans over to place the book down on the low glass coffee table to the side. "She's a nice girl, really," he goes on softly. "But lonely. I don't think she has many other friends, I've been afraid recently she's getting too dependent on me. Sometimes I even get the feeling she'd do anything I tell her to."

Will raises his drink and takes a deep breath first, scenting the rich liquid,before treating himself to a quick sip. And then he exhales and knocks the whole glass back, setting it down beside his book with a slightly too-loud clink that makes Hannibal give a slight wince. He stands without ceremony.

"Well, I'd better get going now," he continues. "Although—" he reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a slick-looking leather wallet, opening it up and slipping free a card— "here." He holds it out and Hannibal takes it, fingertips brushing tightly and lingering for an instant too long. "It's closer to your place. I'll be there around 1am, thought you could go directly instead of having to follow from mine."

He isn't quite as crass as to actually wink, but it's more than implied by the distinct tinge of sauciness in his voice. Then he slips his wallet away and picks up his bag in one graceful motion before turning on his heel. The front door swings slowly closed behind him with a quiet thud as Hannibal absent-mindedly traces the edges of the card with the pads of his fingers, eyes following that slim retreating figure.

He looks down finally, after, to regard the jagged font that spells out, *Monster* in lime green. The graphics on both sides vaguely resemble a strobe light effect, and on the back is an address and opening hours. A nightclub.

* * *

Monster turns out to be not large, but pumping out enough groaning electro to fill five buildings its size. Hannibal can count on one hand the number of times he's been in an establishment such as this, and three of those had been in the line of duty. They'd never appealed even in his youth, always holding the post in his mind of deafening music, readily-spilled alcohol, and the thoroughly unappetising side of human interaction. The fourth was two years earlier when he'd allowed Alana and a few other officers to drag him out at the successful conclusion of a gruelling double-homicide, the whole duration of time inside of which had been spent determinedly planted as far from the dance floor as possible with a glass of the most expensive wine available.

The moment he steps through the narrow door, however, puts that invasively dull evening far to shame. The air is heavy with the scent of unsubtly hidden cigarettes, the particular brand of slush they were passing off as alcohol that particular night, and biting human sweat. A mass

of sequinned clothing marks the dance floor, if it can even be called such, along with bare patches of scantily revealed skin that glints sallow under the pallid flashing lights.

Hannibal makes his way gingerly to the sticky-shiny bar, reluctant even to let the soles of his shoes touch the slick wooden floor that lies permanently darkened by tapped-off ash and the remnants of spirit-flavoured vomit. A shirtless man in lipstick as bright red as his short shorts tries twice to presumably offer him a drink, but not-so-unfortunately fails to be heard above the tune-devoid grind that is spilling through the speakers. He looks at the stool for approximately half a second before opting to stand, as close to the wall as he can get without having to make contact. Half-focused eyes idly scan the crowd without much hope of actually distinguishing any of the euphorically-contorted faces.

He's painfully aware of how much he sticks out in his suit and tie. Several of the patrons who do deign to look at him shoot furtive glances, deciphering his occupation maybe from his firm stance and wondering if he were here to make a bust. He'd considered changing that afternoon as the minutes until 1am ticked on by, as he absent-mindedly twirled the card in his fingers until it had begun to crease, but had ultimately decided against it. He's here for work, after all, and there ought to be no mistaking. And, standing in the yellow puddle of a wall-mounted lamp, he hopes that his conspicuousness might also have a positive.

His watch had read 12:55 as he'd entered, and inches over to the hour as he waits. He keeps his eye on the door at the same time as he keeps his face in the light, hoping to attract the attention one way or another of his bait—or was that bait*er*, he couldn't quite be certain at this point. It crosses his mind once, briefly, at 1:07 that this indeed may be entirely a set-up, either a leadless red herring or even a distraction from something more nefarious. But surely not, not from Will. That would just be rude at this point in their acquaintance.

He sees the coming and going of a differently-palated square of brightness several times before he really takes notice, following it to the swinging door of the men's toilet behind him on the other side of the bar. Another glance at his watch reveals 1:13, the second hand sweeping meticulously over the top twelve. He shoots a last look across the undulating throng before turning and heading in.

Will is propped up on the counter-top, wedged in between one grimy sink and the wall in a way that should be extremely awkward but somehow isn't. The trained officer recognises him immediately despite the way his face is turned away, and obscured by the other man between his legs who stands pressed all along Will's front from hip to tongue. Hannibal finds himself halting, watching the near-obscene oral embrace from his spot frozen between an open cubicle holding a loudly-vomiting man and another couple who lean tangled together against the cracked wall to his right.

Then half-lidded eyes flick around, fall on the intruder, and flash darkly in greeting. The other man conveys a token, if not entirely cognisant confusion when he is pushed away none too gently. Hannibal vaguely notes him slipping past and back out the door as Will hops off the counter and makes his way closer, the right side of his mouth marred just beneath the corner by a thin smear of saliva that sheens in the bleached fluorescent light.

"I thought you'd be on the dance floor?"

The music is less loud, here, but still heavy enough to obscure Hannibal's voice into a spray of hard consonants over droning bass. Will's lips curl into a grin, then part in a chuckle.

"Are you joking? With the awful music and atrocious drinks?"

Hannibal almost gives his agreement, before furrowing his brow in a frown. "Then why do you come?"

"The people, of course, such a colourful bunch and right here's the perfect place to meet them." Will moves closer until the tips of their shoes knock just barely together. "Take that friend I just made—mid-twenties, over-protective family, not even sure he's gay but will do anything to push away from them. He was just complaining about his mother before, telling me all about how boring she can be and how proud she is to be twice-a-week tea buddies with the mayor's wife."

Hannibal doesn't need another one of Will's half-winks to get the implication. Making contacts, then. Bending low to reach high, how lovely a paradox.

"And how about you?" Will continues, voice dropping to be barely audible over the rhythmic thrum. "Have fun out there?"

"No," Hannibal replies curtly.

"But you're having fun now?"

"No."

And Will kisses him.

In a split-second Hannibal's mind freezes, caught in that single point of contact between them. Then several things flash through it, from Alana's frown that morning through a bloody tableau on no-longer-white sheets, to the heat he can almost feel in every one of Will's keen gazes. And then it blanks.

In another split second he's moving, parting his lips and surging forward to taste the lingering bitter-sweet of some cocktail blend, transfer from his previous partner no doubt judging by the earlier clearness in Will's eye and the current precision in his movements. The conclusion draws a low sound from something deep in Hannibal's throat. It all lasts several dizzying, consuming seconds before Will pulls free to mouth up the line of his jaw, breath hot against his ear.

"Liar."

The moment is broken when the door thumps open again and someone pushes roughly past them on his way to the urinals. Hannibal grimaces as he's jolted but Will barely takes a beat before grabbing at the knot of Hannibal's tie, half-ripping it from the collar as he uses it to drag the taller man into a cubicle. The small grunt that Hannibal emits at the sudden constriction is immediately knocked out of him as he's almost thrown against the rickety plastic divider and his mouth engulfed once more.

"Why do you wear this anyway?" Will mutters against his lips, absent hands attempting without much success to smooth down the front of Hannibal's suit. "Shouldn't you have a uniform or something?"

"I'm a plainclothes officer," Hannibal replies between nips, voice more than a little muffled, to a snort.

"You call this plain?"

Any retort that might have come to that dies away as, with one last tweak to the skewed double windsor, Will pulls back and sinks very deliberately to his knees on the surely filthy floor. Hannibal swallows hard and finds he can't keep eye contact as nimble fingers work quickly at the front of his pants. The air bites briefly as he's exposed, already half-hard, before heat washes through his body as he's gently teased to fullness.

Hannibal tugs his bottom lip in between his teeth and bites down a little too hard as Will's practised mouth descends on him. He alternates between deft twists and flicks of his tongue, the hot slide of the full length down his throat, and varying aid from the tight grip of his hand, a fleshly dance played as well as the melody that the music lacks. It keeps Hannibal on edge, drawing him out, teasing and endlessly rewarding all at once.

Hannibal lets his head fall back with a dull thud that rings long and heavy. The hammering bass of the dance outside continues to drive on, matching the audible pound of his own pulse. The uneven hitching of his breaths weaves intimately with the rush of blood in his ears, the arcing pleasure that spark from the tips of his fingers down to his curling toes. The man who almost certainly killed Freddie Lounds is a solid weight against the front of his knees.

Climax, when it comes, is unexpected in its dragging build. The tightness in his abdomen is coiled so gradually that he almost doesn't notice until it flares up his spine and snaps his whole body taut. Hannibal falls all at once, with a growl and a gasp, shaking in sharp jerks that Will takes him through with an unrelenting touch and steadily working throat until it becomes too much to bear.

Afterwards, still upright but with palms pressed flat against the wall behind him, Hannibal only half-notices as Will stands and gently tucks him back into his pants. A hand is placed on his heaving chest, just over his racing heart, as another pulls up his fly and a small closed-mouthed kiss is pressed to the corner of his jaw.

"Well then, Detective, I guess I'll see you around."

Then the door opens on a squeal of unoiled hinges, and he's gone.

Chapter 5

Less than his preferred number of hours of sleep and being greeted by Chilton at the door does not bode for a great morning for Hannibal. He's a little later than the others, having come from the local clinic where he'd put in a rush request. The door of the station is barely clicking shut when the over-zealous doctor stumbles towards him, something imploring in his eyes, and Hannibal sighs inwardly as schools his expression into politeness.

"You know Graham's a killer, don't you?" Chilton pushes out without waiting for an address, tripping to a stop.

Hannibal frowns. "I am seeking to prove such. Why?"

"Well now they're saying he's not!"

He flings an arm through the air at that, looking very much like a housewife throwing a hissy fit. Hannibal is opening his mouth to ask on the pertinent pronoun when he's cut off by a clack of heels.

"Doctor Chilton."

Chilton turns to see Bedelia striding purposely towards them, perfectly made-up face as impassive as ever.

"With all due respect, you are not the psychological advisor on this case," she continues as she slows to a stop. "I am. And you, indeed, are on leave as of today."

"Yes, yes." Chilton waves a hand again, turning back to face Hannibal. "I was just coming in to pick up a few things when I heard her talking about Graham being innocent, you know that can't be right!"

Hannibal clears his throat, looking between the two psychologists, keeping his reaction to the news internalised unlike the man opposite him. "Well, Doctor Du Maurier. I'm glad to hear you were brought on, though I'm afraid you may have to expound a bit more on your conclusion."

Bedelia blinks at him. "There is not a whole lot to expound," she says simply. "There was, and has been no real evidence to tie Mister Graham to the crime, aside from possible opportunity and his widely read book. I myself believe that it is more likely the murder was perpetrated by an individual familiar with his work. To the point of obsession, perhaps." She shifts her stance a little, crossing her manicured hands in front of her. "The only thing unclear is whether it was an act of hate against the author intended to implicate him, or an act of admiration from someone who found his words worthy of being brought to life."

Chilton scoffs loudly, rolling his eyes. "Oh please," he mutters, "his books aren't even that good." Then he looks back beseechingly at Hannibal. "You still agree with me, don't you? Tell me you'll get him put away?"

Hannibal regards him steadily, very much aware of the weight of Bedelia's own gaze, then takes a breath. "I am doing my best."

* * *

He greets Alana at her desk after a much-needed trip to the coffee machine, during which he'd tossed back the bitter liquid like it could burn away the pressingly distracting memory of the previous night's intermixing flavours. She appears to be in the process of going through the publication and print history of Will's books as she turns to bid him good morning.

"You told me yesterday," Hannibal begins, "that Will's mother died of an overdose and that he was questioned about it. Do you have the reports?"

"What?" Confusion crosses his partner's face as she leans an elbow on her tabletop. "No. I mean I could probably get them if we really needed them, but why?"

Hannibal moves forward so he can lean a thigh against the smooth wooden edge. "I have reason to believe that he murdered his mother."

"What?" Alana says again, perplexity drawing out the vowel. "How did you, how is that—" She breaks off, then continues with a sigh. "Not only is that very marginally relevant at best, didn't Doctor Du Maurier talk to you?"

"Yes, she did. I respectfully disagree."

"Really." A purse of glossed but unpainted lips. "I agree Graham's still a high contender, but even if you're not convinced yet the other possibilities are at least worth a good look." She views him for several seconds in silence before dropping her eyes. "And I meant what I said yesterday," she continues a little hesitantly. "I appreciate your focus, Hannibal, but I don't know if it's quite right at the moment. You haven't been following him again, have you?"

Hannibal steps back, then steps back a second time. "No," he replies truthfully, and turns to walk away.

* * *

Wednesday is his own early finish, and he's glad for it. Alana has him looking over reviews and critics' assessments for anything that stands out, while she tries to question his publishing company on whether there has ever been any threatening or overenthusiastic fanmail of note. Not only is Hannibal thoroughly convinced that such endeavours are a waste of time, he also will reluctantly admit that his mind isn't entirely present. Caught instead somewhere between the promise-filled metallic slide of zipper cogs and an almost tender final kiss.

Nothing comes up, unsurprisingly. He finds a large spread ranging from loving praise to disgusted condemnation, the extremes of which he duly records though they are no more or less than any other author's reception. Alana reports to him a similarly unexceptional feedback from the public, but also that she plans to continue searching among his social circles. Hannibal leaves her to it and pops out when lunchtime hits to drop by the clinic again, thanking the receptionist curtly as she relays him what he wants to hear.

He returns to a report from Bedelia on his desk of her own evaluation of the case, as well as a note informing him that a meeting to review the investigation has been scheduled the following day for the two of them as well as Jack and, of course, Alana. Hannibal skims the report in less than two minutes then sets it aside. If it's only solid evidence they lack, he'll find it. He'll get close enough to find it.

He leaves barely on two o'clock, taking with him all the documents he has on Will. Though it's hardly necessary, really, since it's all memorised by now. Every word carefully slotted away in his mind along with his own alternate report of things that can't yet be written down.

There's no pleasant greeting awaiting him on his welcome mat that afternoon. Hannibal tries not to react all too much as he hits the red button on his car key and makes the short walk across the grass. He wipes his feet his habitual two times as he clicks the lock once to the left to open the screen door, and then the wooden one behind it, stepping inside only for his right hand to fly to his gun.

He takes it away again as he takes full scope of the situation, though doesn't quite relax. He nudges the door closed with the side of his foot without looking.

"How did you get in here?"

Will only smiles from his place on the couch, lounged back with one leg crossed over the other. He uncrosses them after a moment to stand, but doesn't walk. "I was wondering if I should be sorry for running off like that last night," he says nonchalantly. "But I didn't really think you'd quite be up for the nitty gritties of a conversation, eh?

Hannibal doesn't answer.

"Ah," he continues a second later. "Bad day at work? How's my investigation going?"

Hannibal exhales, moving forward to look Will straight in the eye, face to face. "The others are becoming unsure," he replies flatly. "They're starting to think you might not be the one."

Will doesn't back down, and Hannibal wouldn't expect him to. "Am I still a suspect?"

"Yes."

"Which means that we shouldn't be here."

"No."

"Mmm." Will sidles closer, voice lowering. "And what do you think, then?"

Hannibal takes a bit to think that over, mulling in his head both the words and the vision of the far from simple man before him. "I think," he finally begins, slowly, "that you're not quite like the rest of us. That you have a very unique gift which you've decided to use in a very interesting way, because while it once could have helped people you've long realised that you don't owe anything to anyone. That you're a very smart man who finds the world a little too easy to solve for your liking, and so you play with things like a child is enticed to desecrate a jigsaw puzzle they have already put together."

Hannibal doesn't bother trying to keep his eyes above the neck. Will is dressed in the same outfit as during that first interview at the station, black shirt tight across his shoulder as thin white fabric encases his legs. Once again, he searches and fails to find the tell-tale line that belies underwear beneath.

"And," Hannibal continues, "I think that you like playing very much, having your hands out to nudge without needing to lead. It's a different kind of power, isn't it, to control but have no one know. How much do you like power, Will?"

His voice had grown low by the end, almost husky, and Will reaches out to tip his chin back up with two fingers. "I'd say," he replies, bringing their gazes together once more, "about as much as you want to fuck me right now."

It's different, this time, in the comfort and familiarity of his home with no sordidly overwhelming atmosphere to bank on. Will's mouth tastes now only of the faintest hint of spearmint mouthwash, and Hannibal's the one dragging as they stumble up the stairs and more than once against the wall on their way to the main bedroom. His jacket and tie are already discarded, almost ripped off, before they make it, and he pushes Will away and onto the mattress with a sharp shove before standing back to remove the rest. Blue eyes watch him undress, flashing darker before he's beckoned down. Then they're kissing again as he lays his full weight over Will, open-mouthed and careless, and it's only a roll to the side with a few tugs and some shifting before they're skin on skin.

Hannibal can feel Will's arousal against his as their legs tangle together, as well as the sharp bone of his hip. Stubble burns Hannibal's upper lip but he doesn't let up. Will's scent is heavy around them, natural spice mixed with a hint of men's shampoo and aftershave, foreign but captivating. Beguiling.

He makes his mistake when he runs a hand down that smooth chest, fingers instinctively curling as if to cup a woman's breast. It doesn't go past Will, as nothing seems too, and the man pulls away with a low, breathless laugh.

"Tell me you really have fucked a guy before?"

Hannibal only inhales, and breathes out deeply.

"Or at least given it to a girl like that?"

No response.

That smile turns devilishly sharp. "Oh god, this is precious."

Hannibal quietens him by sealing their mouths together once again, entwining their tongues and swallowing any more lilting words before they leave Will's throat. Time passes again like this, in the heat of their bodies and the dark swirl of arousal, in the soft sounds that Will utters as they grind against each other and the way his fingers curl to clutch at Hannibal's back. But then, bit by bit, practicality nudges its way into Hannibal's mind again, until he pulls up and away.

"I—I don't have anything."

Will's tongue darts out, lapping idly at his swollen lower lip before it's sucked up between his teeth and chewed on for several seconds. "Would you believe me if I said I'm clean?"

Hannibal looks at him, and turns that over. "I might not be."

"You are. Got yourself tested this morning—right after last night, eh?" And that's a smirk, now. "Asked for rush results too, back already, you'd almost think you were expecting something."

Hannibal clenches his jaw, throat working several times. Then he simply drops back down to bite at Will's lips himself.

It's Will who pulls back next, several heady minutes later. He'd shifted gently to part his legs so that Hannibal by now is lying right between them, hips bracketed by wide-spread knees. He turns his head off to the side to break the kiss.

"You've got lotion or something, yeah?"

His voice is airy, raspy, and Hannibal responds with a lingering suck to a soft patch of skin under Will's jaw before lifting his torso. He braces himself on one arm as he reaches over to the bedside cabinet, pulling open a drawer and not needing to rummage for too long. He pointedly ignores the blatant amusement from the man beneath him as he pulls out a bottle of half-used lubricant.

Hannibal sits back on his haunches as Will pushes against his chest with one open palm and takes the bottle from him. "Don't worry," he says half breathlessly, undoing the cap with a few quick flicks and coating his fingers, "I cleaned myself out earlier."

An image of Will in the shower like that flashes briefly through Hannibal's mind, before it's promptly overtaken in entirety by the sight before him now. Will's lips fall apart as he eases one finger inside himself, and then another to spread. He's fully hard, lying flushed against his thigh, and Hannibal takes the plunge when he adds a third to touch him.

Will hums, soft and low in his throat as he's steadily stroked, slipping his fingers in and out of his own body in a gradually smoothing slide. Hannibal notes curiously the hot stiffness of the heavy shaft in his hand, the slick glide of foreskin, and the silky-softness of the head that he runs a questioning thumb over every now and then. He engrosses himself in the motion of touching another man, practised yet so unfamiliar, until Will removes his fingers away to pick up the bottle once more.

The cool drizzle of liquid over his own heated flesh draws a quiet hiss from Hannibal, which transforms into a throaty sigh as the lubricant is swiftly spread out with deft fingers. He takes his cue and runs his hands along the creamy skin of Will's inner thighs, parting them further as he shifts forward his hips just a little unsteadily . Then he hisses again.

The first push inside has him stilling for several moments before he forces himself to continue in a few rough, jerky movements, trying to get used to the tightness. Will allows this for a little before losing patience, reaching up to drag Hannibal down with a growl, still slick fingers digging wetly around his sides. He moves his hands again after Hannibal drops forward to lie chest to chest once more, raking down his back and settling over his buttocks, guiding Hannibal's hips into his own preferred rhythm.

Hannibal can feel Will's moans in the vibration of his throat as he gasps breathily and open-mouthed into the side of the other man's neck. Will rocks their bodies firmly together, sharp and rough, but a little too demanding. It isn't very long before he grows impatient for a second time with the way Hannibal can't quite keep up, pushing him over to his side in one fluid motion.

Hannibal blinks as he suddenly finds himself on his back, and Will swinging a leg over to straddle him. He braces himself with both hands on Hannibal's chest as he rides him hard, back arched, taking what he wants. Hannibal lets him do the work as the growing, tingling pleasure begins to build.

It goes on. His expensive bedframe is too sturdy to rock, but the steady squeak of springs falls matching with the slap of their skin. The shift of Will's muscles as he moves is almost mesmerising, then something seems to come over him.

Half-focused eyes don't immediately notice the glint in Will's own, the sudden hint of challenge he keeps trained on Hannibal. Slowly he shifts his weight, still not breaking rhythm, to lean only on a single arm. The other hand slides off across the sheets and under the pillow that lies unused behind Hannibal's head.

He keeps eye contact, locked and steely, as he pulls out a leopard-print scarf.

In a second Hannibal feel his pulse stop, then race. His hands are by his sides, not raised above him, and Will doesn't seem to move to change that. He only touches the silk to the side of Hannibal's face, moving one end across his jaw then downwards until it rests across his neck. The thin fabric rests ticklishly against his skin, bracketing the front of his throat.

There's another of those endless moments of stalemate between them, of threat and promise, but then Hannibal doesn't wait to see what Will does next. Without warning he moves, sitting up and having to wrap one arm around Will's hips to prevent him for toppling, keeping him in his lap but with the both of them sitting upright. And then in another snap Hannibal rips the scarf from Will's grasp and wraps it backwards across the other man's neck.

He braces one hand on the mattress behind him, the other clenched around both ends of the scarf between Will's shoulder blades to pull it taut but not tight around his throat, and begins to snap up his hips to meet Will halfway. Will cries out and throws his head back, hands coming around to clutch at Hannibal's shoulders and fingers curling to dig blunt nails into

tense muscle. The bow of his back pushes his erection against Hannibal's stomach to surge at the join of their bodies.

And that's how they move, locked together, the crackling fever building within them and between them like a wave that sucks the beach dry in its rise to its peak. Until the tide spills over, and everything falls.

Chapter 6

Hannibal opens his eyes the next morning with an ache in his upper thighs, a steady sting over the skin of his back, and the soft breath of another on the second pillow. He turns his head to see Will lying on his right side, turned towards him, expression smoothed out in rest. There's only a single point of contact between them, the lightest touch of Will's fingertips as they rest gently on the crook of Hannibal's outstretched left elbow. It feels uncannily intimate.

Hannibal shifts, turning onto his own side to better face his companion, only for the movement to draw a crease across Will's brow, then a soft sigh from his parted lips as he blinks awake. Light eyes take a moment to dart and focus before he smiles softly.

"Good morning." The words are only a little hoarse. "What's the time?"

Hannibal casts a glance over at the bedside clock. "Almost 8 o'clock."

"Mm, I should go." Will removes his hand from Hannibal's arm, leaving a curiously bereft patch of skin, and rubs it over his face.

"Yes." Hannibal turns away and pushes himself up into a sitting position, swinging his legs off the edge of the bed. Behind him he hears the rustle of Will slipping also out from under the creased sheets. He adds, perfunctorily, after a beat, "You shouldn't have stayed."

There's a small exhale of a laugh. "Stayed?"

Hannibal looks up as Will walks lightly around the side of the bed, bending to pick up his discarded clothing. His eyes automatically flick down the length of the man's nude form and he says again, a little quieter, "You shouldn't have come."

Will dresses with practised ease, running an idle few fingers through his tangled hair then reaching down again for the scarf that had fallen at some point off the side of the mattress. He rises with a quirk to his lips, twisting the fabric between his hands. "Were you scared last night?"

Hannibal looks at him tightly. "Were you?"

That gets him a wider smile, before Will turns and walks off on bare feet. By the time Hannibal has donned a robe and made his way downstairs, he's doing up his shoes by the open front door. Hannibal gets a small peck suspiciously like the one he'd received in that disreputable cubicle before the man is slipping out and away.

Breakfast is cooked by rote, a simple omelette with vegetables. Hannibal heads back upstairs afterwards to brush his teeth and take a shower, allowing himself just a moment to appreciate the lingering scent of open carnality on his skin before he switches on the water and picks up the soap. He shrugs on a dress shirt afterwards over the red scratches marring his upper back with the barest hint of hesitation.

Then he descends again to pick up his own strewn clothing, returning them to his bedroom. He casts a lingering eye over his bed before his leaves, rumpled in a way that isn't entirely blatant but hints seedily at something very indiscreet. He has to reach into yesterday's jacket pocket to take out his badge, turning it over twice in his hands. A reminder. An unorthodox inquiry, but still an investigation. And he expects to see Will back at the station very soon.

The drive through early morning traffic is calmingly familiar, but the busyness at the station when he enters catches him by surprise. Jack is standing off to one side deep in conversation with two other officers, but breaks off as soon as he spots Hannibal and makes his way over.

"Good, you're here. Call came in from a landlady this morning," he says curtly as soon as he comes within hearing distance. "Body of one Nicholas Boyle, throat cut but murder weapon not found, age twenty-six, agent at a publishing company. Once Bloom gets back you can head off to the site."

Hannibal nods once in acknowledgement, then asks, "Where is she now?"

"Doing a pick up." Jack pulls back his sleeve and checks his watch. "Should be back any minute, in fact." His voice drops, face turning dark. "Guess whose books he published."

Hannibal swallows, and casts down his eyes. Well then, he thinks a little wryly, even sooner than he'd expected. He looks back up when the door opens again and Alana enters like she was heralded.

Will is in tow behind her, dressed in the same clothes he'd worn the previous day—and that morning—face composedly light. He appears somewhere in the middle between carefully clueless and aloofly amused. His eyes move over as he steps through the doorway, resting on Hannibal who finds he can't meet them.

"Caught him just getting home," Alana informs bluntly, and Jack turns towards Will to give him the full brunt of his stare.

"Did she now. Were you out last night, then?"

A blink, and a twitch of an eyebrow. "Yes."

"Were you alone?"

Hannibal feels something distinctly heavy roll in his stomach. Jack is expectant, almost eager, and Will looks at the chief with his countenance utterly smooth. His lips part slowly as he forms his very deliberate reply.

"No."

* * *

"I don't believe you."

From his place seated at his desk, turned resolutely towards his computer screen despite it's obvious lack of power, he imagines Alana standing with her arms crossed and her eyes boring into his back. Done already, it seemed, with the interview Jack had whisked Will off into—Hannibal himself denied on the basis of 'conflicts of interest'.

"I know you've always been a little interpretive of rules. I'm your partner, I deal with it, usually it works." There's a single click of a heel, just a shifting of weight. "But sleeping with a suspect? Are you *trying* to build a case to be laughed out of court?"

"I thought he wasn't your suspect anymore."

"Oh no." There's more clacks, then, several steps closer. "You're good at that, changing the subject, turning things backwards. But you're not doing it now." Her voice isn't loud, and there's no anger, only a soft disbelief. "What are you going to call it, then? Deep investigation? Or just questioning with a side of a cheap fuck?"

The unexpected profanity from her draws Hannibal around, and he turns slowly in his seat. Alana's jaw is tight, expression pinched and cheeks pale. He's disappointed her, Hannibal realises.

He opens his mouth to answer before he's entirely sure of what to say, and closes it once again in quiet relief as Jack interrupts them by stalking up, face stormy. Behind him, Hannibal sees Will exit the interrogation room and be ushered off by another officer, and only lets his gaze linger for a second before he directs it back to his chief. Said relief, however, is short-lived.

"Will you back him up? Can you attest to his location as he claims?"

Hannibal takes a breath. "Yes."

"Then his alibi checks out," is all Jack says, simple and blunt. Then he twists his head over to address Alana. "Boyle scene's ready for you. They'll give you the address, you can be right off."

Alana hesitates for one moment, then nods and swivels on her heel. Hannibal makes to stand as she walks away, only for Jack to pin him again with his glare.

"And where do you think you're going?" The words aren't entirely cold, just speaking as a man under pressure, and without time. "You're compromised. You're off the case, pending review." He exhales his last words as he turns to return to his office. "Go home, Detective."

* * *

He doesn't go home.

He sits in the car for some time, in fact, an elbow propped on the open window frame. One vehicle enters the car park and two pull out while he rests, face tilted upwards a little to catch the light breeze. He's a good enough officer that he'd seen this coming, at least eventually, but instead of resentful or self-deprecating he finds himself calm.

He doesn't fully know where this game is going, how it spins, Will's too smart to be predictable. What Hannibal does know is his target, the sign at the end of the street that he stumbles towards even if he can't quite yet decipher the words. He can't help but wonder, still, how much of this might have been planned for him all along.

When he peels away finally it's with a strangely flat sense of resolve. The dark asphalt rolls steadily beneath as he makes the now-familiar drive, street names passing in gentle guides of thick block lettering. Yellow lights to red draw no frustration, not like with the other drivers sometimes beside him who lean on their pedals to make their whatever appointments. If there is one thing Hannibal prides himself on it is the clarity of his mind, even after certain lapses.

He must have been beaten quite a margin by Will's drop-off, as the man answers the door in a loose white shirt and casual pants with his hair curling damply around his forehead. His face is devoid of his usual tinge of saucy amusement, he looks almost fond. Hannibal doesn't bother with pleasantries.

"So how did you do it?"

Will drops his eyes a little. "Still sure about me, then?"

"Did you really expect me to give up?"

"Not for a moment."

Hannibal almost smiles. "Are you as unsaddened by Mister Boyle's death as you are by Miss Lounds's?"

Will's lips thin, and he hesitates before replying. "Not quite. We were only colleagues, not friends, but he was a good agent. Though I guess sometimes these things just have to happen."

Hannibal walks past him to enter without an invitation. It's an audacity he'd never usually have the discourtesy to take, yet by now it's hardly the greatest liberty between him and Will Graham. He makes his way into the small living room and to a worn but nice-looking couch opposite the television. The same couch, he realises as he sits, that had held the robe he'd expected to find on it's owner the last time he'd been summoned to this room.

Will follows behind him, but then passes through without stopping to disappear into what appears to be a kitchen. He returns a moment later with a glass of scotch despite it being barely noon, and hands it over without a word. Hannibal takes a sip and swallows around the burn.

"Are you still working on that book?" he drops, only flailing a little for a pleasantry.

"Oh yes." Will shifts from one foot to another. "Going very well as a matter of fact, something must have really fired up my creativity. My detective's almost out of his mind."

Hannibal drinks again, a little longer, and lets his gaze wander out the tall windows. He can see the sand from here, where it meets the water, and one lone seagull which hops along the shoreline. A little section of its own, out of town, away from the clutches of wealth and development, on the swell of the waves and the tide of the wind. He wonders if he could live here. "Are you sure about that?"

"Of course. It's my story."

Will turns and sits down on the other couch cushion, angled so that their knees bump together. Hannibal takes another long sip, letting the sharp liquid swirl around his mouth before swallowing and bracing himself for the aftertaste. It's not quite as good as his own preferred brand but it's not bad either.

"What about you, then?" Will continues after a few seconds of silence. "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

Hannibal crosses one leg over the other, balancing his cup on his knee and not backing down this time at the imitation of a certain someone else on a certain other day. "I thought we'd be above pretending by now that you don't know exactly what you're doing."

Will cocks his head to regard him, eyes sweeping over his posture and his expression. "They took you off the case?" he says finally, then, "I'm sorry." And Hannibal can almost believe it.

He leans closer when there's no reply, and it suddenly seems the most natural thing for Hannibal to slide a hand around the back of his neck and pull him in for a kiss. Closed-mouthed, not too long, it could almost be called chaste.

"I was just about to start on lunch," Will says with a small smile as they pull back. "Would you like to help?"

* * *

Hannibal has always enjoyed cooking. The process is subtle, piecing something together at the trust of a few words and numbers by a stranger at the other end of a printing press or internet line, not to mention rewarding. And there's always been something relaxing as well about the steady thump of a knife on wood.

Will plans out a salad and stir-fry which are not quite as elaborate as Hannibal himself would have selected given his unexpected influx of free time. The majority of both the preparation and the meal itself is spent in companionable silence that, by the end, begins to feel uneasily domestic. And when Will's finishing up the washing in front of the sink it's far too easy for

Hannibal to slide his hands around his waist, mouth along the back of his neck, and let himself be lead to the bedroom.

He's sucking a meandering line across Will's bare chest when fingers creep over his shoulders to gently urge him further down, and he finds himself complying. He doesn't have much of a chance to contemplate the oddness of seeing another man at this vantage point before he leans in to take Will in his mouth, jaw flexing around the stretch and the unfamiliar flavour on his tongue. One hand drops away to the mattress and another cards slowly through his hair.

He isn't really sure what he's doing, and though he tries vaguely to replicate what he knows feels good he doesn't think it's entirely working. Still, there's a heady sort of power in the act, a visceral rush that floods through him at the base touch. It isn't long though before his neck begins to ache and his jaw to cramp, but thankfully it's about then that Will slips two fingers under his chin to pull him off and back up.

He prepares Will himself this time with the lubricant left unashamedly out on the bedside table, breaths heavy at the already electrifying constriction around only his fingers. And he doesn't need Will's guidance now when he pushes in, snapping his hips in deep, steady drives that have the other man cursing softly in his ear. He knocks Will's hand away too when he goes to touch himself, taking over with his own and working them both until they break.

Afterwards, Will lies back against him, head lolling on his shoulder and one hand strewn over his gradually slowing heart. Hannibal gives himself ten minutes before he slips out from the loose embrace, giving a little involuntary shiver at the coolness of the air against his lightly sweat-glazed skin. Will turns as he redresses.

"You don't have to leave?"

Hannibal looks up over him, and the tousled bed. "I think I should."

"I'd like if you stayed. I liked it when you let me stay. Not many people do."

Hannibal doesn't answer, and forces his eyes to pull away from Will's strangely open face. Then he walks out the door without another word, still only half-dressed. He doesn't look back.

He slips his phone out of the pocket of his pants almost as soon as they're on fully, dialling Alana with one hand before leaning over to retie his shoes. There's quite a few rings before she answers, more than usual, and he takes that time to slide on his jacket. But she does answer.

"What have you found out about Boyle?"

The sigh is audible from the other side. "You're off the case, Hannibal, for good reason. God, you're probably with him now, aren't you?"

Hannibal wait a moment until Will's front door swing shut behind him, and truthfully answers, "No."

"And not only are you off the case, you're going through review. You know I can't talk to you."

"That means I can investigate without the constraints of official procedure. Let me help, you know I can."

"Hannibal..."

"Alana." He says her name firmly, but gently, then drops his voice. "You know me, Alana. And you know Graham will never open for the force. Do you trust me?"

Hannibal can feel her warring with herself in the silence, weighing up her technical responsibilities against the man whom she'd replied on in the field and out for the last two years. He moves the phone to his left hand as he unlocks his car and gets inside, connecting the call to the speaker system. He knows which one will win.

"He wasn't just an agent at the same company," she says eventually, heavily. "He was on Graham's first draft review board, but that's not the only part. Guess who else is on the board."

Hannibal's car starts with a purr, and he swallows. "Freddie Lounds."

"Yes. And Abigail Hobbs, which I guess makes sense if they're friends, or whatever." She pauses once more, torn again, before finally pressing on. "And one Frederick Chilton."

Chapter 7

Hannibal wakes late the next day, the high sun confusing him for several moments. It's been a long time since he'd slept in, his body having become regular enough with waking that he no longer needed to set an alarm for work each morning. His outing two evenings ago certainly hadn't helped, though it seemed the direct culprit was the hours he'd lain awake the previous night with his thoughts in a swirl.

Chilton. And Will. He'd turned the names over in his head as he tried to find grasp at any explanation for the connection. He feels close, maddeningly so, as if there's something big broiling just beneath the surface. And he can't shake the thought that everything he knows so far is because Will let it be, and that rest will come in his design.

He settles for leftovers for breakfast and brews himself some coffee which he accidentally adds too much milk to. He drinks it anyway, sitting in the chair at the table that faces him towards the front window, and mentally nudges himself when he realises he's waiting. He leaves the plate in the sink and takes a glass of tropical fruit juice to recline on his couch with along with a classical CD.

He'd gone into this certain that he could unravel Will Graham by tangling himself, playing the game until he was deep enough to see through it, like how getting lost is the only way to navigate a maze in which you have no idea where to go. Yet, something seems to have changed along the way, and now he finds himself wondering if the maze has no end after all. If their connection now is something living, twisting and changing at every turn until it wraps around again.

He even picks up his home phone just before lunch, and holds it against his ear before his finger freezes blankly over the dial pad. He remembers also then that his state has left him dependant on the research of others. He could get away with asking Alana about Chilton, but perhaps not so much with something as obvious as Will's phone number.

So he calls Alana instead, and gets told to wait as she makes her way out of the station to somewhere she can speak without being overheard. Always a cautious one.

"I looked into Chilton," she says once the soft murmur of background chatter dies completely away to be replaced by the irregular growl of passing car engines. "Turns out it's a little more complicated."

Hannibal presses the phone harder against his ear. "Yes?"

"I found his records from New Orleans. He was there when Will Graham tried to join, but he wasn't a psychologist. At the time, actually, he was the police surgeon."

That draws a frown. "Then why was he advising on a recruit's mental state?" He'd given Alana a rundown the previous day of Chilton's assertions to him. It had made her information seem at least somewhat like an even exchange.

"Exactly. It wasn't an official opinion, though it seems he was strong enough about it that they ended up listening to him. He was probably right to some degree as well, Graham's file has a lot of notes about an empathy-related disorder, from a couple of different reviewers who didn't agree about what exactly that meant. They finally decided he had too much potential to be dangerous, likely at Chilton's insistence if he's telling the truth."

"I see." Hannibal runs over the new information, mentally slotting it into the portrait and timeline that he'd almost inadvertently amassed of Will in his head. His frown deepens when things only become even less easy to correlate.

But then Alana continues, "Anyway that's not the point," and his ears perk up again. "After Graham was denied, an 'anonymous tipster' revealed to the NOPD that Chilton had actually failed out of med school. It's why he moved states, and probably why he switched to psychology."

And that has Hannibal's brain whirring. It doesn't really latch, though, but while he doesn't know what he's sure it's something.

"I talked to Doctor Du Maurier, it seems Graham sent Chilton his first published book to rub in his face how successful he'd become. Then brought him on the official review board to add insult to injury, I guess, and kept going with each new draft."

"I see," Hannibal says for the second time once she finishes. He's staring, not at anything in particular since he's facing towards his blank wall, but his gaze is locked as his thoughts race. Then he clears his throat, and blinks several times. "First Lounds and then Boyle, should we think about protection for Chilton? And Hobbs, for that matter?"

Alana hums in thought for a moment before answering. "You could say there's a pattern, I suppose, though motive is still as much of a mystery as ever. Plus there's the fact that we're not supposed to know who Hobbs is yet."

"But surely you'd have looked her up after seeing her name on the list? That she's in personal contact with the author she reviews too isn't too large a leap to make."

A sigh, a slow one. "Alright, I'll speak to Jack. We'll probably have to bother Chilton on leave anyway, at least just to ask him ourselves."

"Good." Hannibal pauses, then adds, "Thank you, Alana."

"You're welcome. I'll talk to you later." And then comes the click of disconnection.

He unpeels the phone from the side of his face after a few seconds, and sets it carefully back down on its stand. "Will Graham—" he mutters to himself, and it's supposed to be the start of a sentence but he finds himself cutting off right there. Inadvertently, it ends up sounding something close to reverent.

Lunch is more leftovers, eaten off his breakfast plate fetched still unwashed from the sink. Then he decides he can't stay in anymore and changes into a smartly casual outfit to head out

to the local park. He receives a text from Alana as he's leaving informing him that they'd attempted to contact Chilton but had been unsuccessful, and would continue trying.

He walks for about half an hour before he reaches the small field and playground, the sunlight pleasantly warm and the lightest of breezes picking up the air. The bench is free and he takes it to sit back casually on. Over to the right is a small pond, and a toddler runs around it happily chasing the ducks. His mother, or perhaps babysitter, watches with amusement from where she leans against a tree-trunk, eating a croissant which she occasionally picks some bits off to toss at the hopping birds. Hannibal feels a small smile curl his lips. He wonders if Will was ever that carefree when he was a child.

He stays there for sometime, letting the chorus of quacks and giggling of children lull his thoughts. No real progress is made, as is becoming expected it seems, instead he finds himself drifting slowly through his envisioned construction of Will's life, mental eye lingering from his wicked smirk to the way his face contorts in the peak of pleasure. Would he be writing now, or maybe enjoying the sun on his beachchair? Or fixing another motor in his shed, screwdriver glinting where it sticks out sharp and deliberate from his hand.

He buys dinner from an organic deli down the road, small but more than good enough for even his high standards. It's already evening as he makes his way back home, the sun glowing red from it's position low on the horizon. And it's almost gone by the time he gets the second text.

It comes in just as he's stepping up to his front door. He pulls out his phone at the buzz, and frowns a little at the unfamiliar number. He draws the message up with a swipe of his thumb.

> *You're the only one who still sees properly. He's gotten to the rest of them, twisted their minds around like he does. But you know, you agree, he needs to be put away.*
>
> *If you want to see Will Graham for what he really is, come now.*
>
> *- FC*

Below is an address. Hannibal reads the text three times before he slowly lowers his other hand from the doorknob and takes up his keys again. Then he opens the map function and types in the destination, already turning back to his car.

It's not right. That much he can feel. For a start he has no idea how Chilton got his number, unless he asked it from Jack which seems unlikely given the nature of his contact. And then there's something that seems oddly familiar about the address, but he can't quite recall what. He shouldn't go, yet neither can he ignore it. He should call back-up, but he can't do anything official without going through Alana, and there's no time for that now.

It's not until he's almost there that it hits him, as the street he's driving down is recognised in a sudden click of cogs. In a second his hands tense on the wheel, and his foot drops.

He's heading to Abigail Hobbs's apartment.

* * *

It's fully dark by the time he pulls up and stops in the driveway, ignoring the multiple no parking signs. The light to Abigail's apartment is on. He doesn’t bother to turn off the car, just jams on the handbrake and leaps out.

It's too sudden. From a day of quiet to this, he should have expected something. His mind races as fast as his feet, jumping without really concluding. One phrase rings though, clear, propelling. *If you want to see Will Graham for what he really is.*

He presses every button on the intercom, and wrenches open the door as soon as someone answers without hearing the greeting. The lift is ignored as he races up the stairs, one hand reaching for his gun and ripping off the safety. The door to 301 is ajar, and he enters barrel first.

He stops again as he sees, and inhales in a rush. A young woman whom Hannibal recognises from his research stands in the kitchen, eyes sightless and red spurting from her throat. A bloody cooking knife lies at her feet among the dark drops and splashes that cover the grubby tiles beneath her. The only reason she's upright is the man who supports her, arms around her shoulder and back turned towards the door.

Hannibal recognises the spray as arterial, she's bleeding too fast. She might as well be dead already. But then training, and adrenaline, take over, and something snaps into place around him. Something he calls his police persona, but which has quietly whispered to him things much darker in the times between the silences. And all of a sudden the panic floods away from his mind to be replaced by deadly calm. "Let her go," he says, cold, distant to his own ears, and the man turns.

"Lecter?" Chilton's voice is strained, surprised. "It was—you have to help—"

"Move away from her," Hannibal repeats, louder, heart pounding too loudly in his temples for him to properly listen. He takes a step forward.

Chilton doesn't move. "She's going to bleed out," he says in a rush, words tumbling over each other. One hand moves away from Abigail's shoulder, and towards his belt.

Hannibal steps again, closer. "Raise your hands, and move away from her." His voice steels to its hardest and this, this is familiar. The weight of a weapon in his hand, an easy target in front of him. His pulse is racing, and he doesn't want to think on how it's not entirely in fear.

Chilton still doesn't obey. "She's going to die!" Chilton says, now almost a cry, eyes darting and sweat beading on his lip. The fingers of his free hand spread, stretching into an open palm like he's trying to communicate something, then plunge into his pocket.

And Hannibal pulls the trigger.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The inside doorknob of the interrogation room is very well polished.

Hannibal had never really considered the differences between the two sides of the table before. From this side, he can see the door and the occasional dark shadow which crosses the frosted glass as the other officers bustle to and fro on the other side. He can also see all too clearly Jack's expression, softly sympathetic underneath his veneer of professionalism, not too severe but still visible circles sagging his eyes.

They tell him that they've confirmed his text as coming from Frederick Chilton's phone, and verified the prints on the knife from the same man's fingers. They inform him that they found copies of all of *William Howle*'s drafts perfectly kept in his apartment including one that had only just come in, about a detective who gets stuck on the wrong suspect. It ends with the man's colleague bleeding out from his throat on a cold kitchen floor as he arrives just seconds too late.

They also assure Hannibal that his assumption was perfectly understandable, that Chilton was a murderer anyway and that no one could have guessed that he was only reaching at that time for a handkerchief. To try to close her neck, presumably, as Doctor Du Maurier had said in her assessment. To play himself off as a victim when he'd miscalculated just how quickly Hannibal would get to the third storey after his car pulled in, and had missed his chance to escape via the open window and easily accessible tree outside. She'd talked, apparently, of how he must have developed a strong obsession with Will Graham via his work through the years, a mixture of growing veneration and his personal anger for revenge colliding in his attempts to both frame the author using his own perfect tableaus and to be rid of his other privileged readers in jealousy.

And no one even hints at the possibility that the shot straight though the heart was anything but the easiest target and a lucky hit, suggests it could possibly have been an intent to kill. Everyone, in fact, is so cautious around his 'trauma' that they even gloss over the fact that he wasn't technically in the line of duty at the time. They're all oh so kind.

When his own questioning finishes, Hannibal stands without a word. Jack halts him with an unusual hand on his shoulder, then only manages to get out, "Get some rest." Hannibal nods, and leaves.

Alana is seated at her desk as he makes the short walk from one side of the station to the exit, no doubt already working on their next big case. She turns her head as he passes. He doesn't stop, and she doesn't greet, but their gazes wander and meet. She's a smart woman, really, a very good officer and the best of partners, Hannibal will acknowledge that with certainty. And so there's no pretence in that barest moment that they don't both know exactly where he's going.

He arrives at Will's house to find door already ajar, and steps inside to see the living room floor scattered with boxes in various stages of filling. One holds clothes, another books and a third crockery, the rest a jumble with no discernible categorisation. The man himself is crouched down in front of a low chest of drawers, emptying out the bottom ones. Hannibal clears his throat.

"You're leaving?"

Will stands, and turns to him slowly. "I heard what happened. I thought it might be best to move on."

"Where are you going?"

"Not sure yet."

Hannibal walks forward, weaving around the obstacles. He spots in one box, tangled up with a stack of loosely folded shirts, that leopard-print scarf. And in another he sees a clear case of tools, including one long Phillips head.

And it hits him suddenly that this is it. The end of the story, each of the pages now being pressed down and packed away as the book flips shut. The end of the case, the end of their tangled dance, and he still has no idea what it means. Yet, he has the marked feeling that someone has won.

So Hannibal steps up to Will Graham, former suspect and now official victim, and does the only thing he can think of to do. He kisses him.

* * *

It's different, this time.

They don't make it to the bedroom, clearing out a space by the short couch, the floor hard and the polished wood cool. They don't break for lubricant and Will lets Hannibal use saliva, hissing at the burn and gasping as he rides it out. It's not fast but it's hard, ardent, consuming.

And when it's over Hannibal lets Will curl against his side and slips one arm firmly around his narrow waist, sitting up against the side of the couch with the other man half on his lap. It's Will who speaks first, after a long while. His voice is a little muffled from where his mouth is pressed to Hannibal's collarbone.

"I finished my book."

Hannibal looks down at the tangle of curls beneath this nose, then back up. "Yes, I saw."

"Did you read the first version, then? What did you think?"

"Not all of it, forensics have had it." Then he pauses. "What do you mean, first version?"

"Oh, yes." Will lifts his head and shifts a little to look Hannibal in the eye. "I ended up rewriting it, changed the ending. Though I suppose I'll have to find another publisher now."

"The ending." Hannibal repeats, as his lips curl just a little. "What happens, then?"

And Will returns the smile freely. "The detective doesn't get the suspect wrong, he gets it completely right. And this time, they drive each other crazy."

He's looking at Hannibal very keenly, and something seems to settle over the room that could either be very cold or very hot. Because that line of Will's mouth is the one that Hannibal knows, the one that speaks of deadly chances and hunts that haven't quite ended yet. He doesn't move as Will pulls away and turns to lift something from a box.

"Here."

A manuscript is offered. Hannibal accepts it with a very long stare, and he knows that this is more than just an author's day job. He takes one breath, audibly, before turning to the end.

> *The survivor looks at him, her friend, the one who understood, and she wants to cry and scream but she can't. The knife she'd held herself only the previous night is now at her own neck, slicing just as easily as she'd cut that other man's throat. It'd all seemed so clear when he'd handed it to her with a smile and a whispered, "I need you to do something, for me?" and when she'd done it because she'd do anything and she'd already done it once, because something inside her is broken and never can be fixed. There's pain, but it's secondary, mostly she just feels the hot sluice of blood down her body as he says, "I'm sorry," and she knows he really means it.*
>
> *The summoned man, the false doctor, widens his eyes in horror. His mouth opens, but her friend holds her up with one arm and pulls a gun with the other, gloved finger ready on the trigger.*
>
> *"Don't scream," he says. "Take it." And holds out the knife.*
>
> *The other man does, and then she's being pushed into a set of shocked arms as her friend disappears, off and away forever. She hears the heavy blade clatter to the ground as her head begins to spin, and her vision spots black. Consciousness slips away as footsteps sound, as it should be, and the survivor who shouldn't have survived dies knowing that, for someone at least, things went right.*

The bulk-bought, home-printed pages feel very heavy in his hands as Hannibal slowly looks up. Three-hundred and seventy-eight of them, so the final footnote reads, and he can imagine each of them beautifully bound around their razor-sharp edges in scarlet leather.

"Everything," he says, softly, "all this time." And it's not a question.

Will isn't smiling anymore, and it's different. He's looking at Hannibal once more with that piercing gaze of his, the one that can see everything for what it is. The one that only Chilton

recognised for just how deadly it could be.

Then he stands without speaking, and pads gently away. Hannibal follows, barely feeling the touch of the wood under his bare feet, as Will heads to the side of the room and opens the balcony doors. The air is cool over their naked skin as they step outside into the long, deserted stretch of yellow-blue shoreline.

"I didn't kill my mother."

Will's voice is quiet when he speaks, words wafting out to be swept up by the wind and carried away to be lost in the waves.

"She'd regretted leaving my father. Regretted a lot, for a long time. When she saw me again, she couldn't take it. There was nothing I could do." He whips around suddenly, eyes bright. "But then I wrote it out, and I changed it. I told you, didn't I, I can do anything as a writer. I can create a world where her death wasn't out of control, and a world where Abigail Hobbs can recover from something that breaks you forever."

And Hannibal realises, Will Graham isn't insane. In fact is mind is very, very clear, in a way that others will never comprehend. Hannibal's voice sounds hoarse to even his own ears when he replies. "And what was this, then, trying out a new style?"

He gets a small laugh, breathless. "Well that's the thing about writing the story, you don't get to be in it."

He lifts out a hand, and reaches towards Hannibal's chest. He doesn't move like he thinks Hannibal might flinch away, not even as Hannibal expects himself to do just that. But somehow he doesn't, and those deft fingers make contact, trialling from his collarbone down his pectoral.

"You don't get to see things as they happen," Will continues, close to a whisper. "You don't get to meet your characters, and appreciate what you've done with them." And then he begins to smile again, not impish or mischievous like before, but dark. "How did you like killing Chilton?" he breathes, words heavy in the air. "Was it as good as the others?"

And that darkness sings. Hannibal clenches his teeth as he feels something inside him rise to it, a part of himself he's tried to keep buried for so long. "I don't enjoy killing," he says, and it sounds rehearsed because it is, repeated countless times inside his own head.

Will laughs again. "I'm sure," he says, but then he lets the grim mirth slide away and his tone turn almost perplexed. "Except, actually I wasn't." There's a strange mix in his gaze, that looks very much like both disbelief and a kind of reverence. "That's the other thing, sometimes blood isn't as easy as ink. You were different, Hannibal, you were unexpected. You turned out to be interesting."

Will slips his hand around to Hannibal's back and steps forward, pressing their fronts together in one long warm touch. His other hand moves up to cup Hannibal's jaw, to stroke over his lips to his cheekbones, faces close enough that they're breathing the same breath. Their gazes are still locked, and it's more than just plain sight.

Hannibal looks, really looks, and he tries to imagine Will's world. Other lives so easy and small through the eyes of a man who understands everyone, nothing more or less than a canvas to paint and fold in his image. Creating meaning where there was only chaos, structure in the place of randomness. Beauty in slow but sure decay. He can feel it as Will parts his lips and whispers against his own, "Come with me."

A hunger roars in Hannibal mind, body still humming from the aftershocks of their pleasure, but it's one that he's gotten very good at beating down. "No."

Will closes the last hair's breadth to bring their lips together, then it's only the two of them cocooned in salty air above a world that's in their grasp, a promise carved out in sand. When he pulls back, it's only far enough to speak again.

"Liar."

Chapter End Notes

Whew, and done! I actually had this entire thing written before I started posting, I'm pretty proud of myself for getting out 21k in 13 days (although unedited). Call out again to asha-volca-nova (GhostPatches) who helped whip my writing into shape, and silverangelfeathers (Silverfeathered_Angel) who sanity checked some truly baffling typos that had somehow made their way in and also was the bestest cheerleader :-D I don't usually use betas because I'm too impatient, but these guys were both very useful and really awesome in editing this writing storm.

This ended up being the plottiest thing I've written as well, which was a lot fun. I did take a lot of guidance from the Basic Instinct film though, which by the way is great and quite a bit more complex (as well as very sexy). I definitely recommend it, if mystery and manipulation is your thing :-)

This is also my first completed WIP. *sniff* My babies are growing up... any and all feedback will be very greatly appreciated and feedbackers enthusiastically glomped by the power of Hannigram and Sharon Stone's legs. As always, feel free to message, poke, and/or threaten to eat me over at my tumblr, or failing that I'll take a comment XD

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